



Kapa'a Pediatrics, LLC

Potty Training

When to start? There seem to be two very polar opposite theories when it comes to potty training.

- 1) Train them early. Many "Potty training" specialist sometimes boast about getting infants trained as young as 4-6 months of age. The term Elimination Communication (EC) is used to describe this early training. More commonly starting training around 15 months of age is now considered on the earlier end. Benefits such as saving the environment from filling the landfills with diapers, less diaper rash, and saving money are commonly reported.
- 2) Let them tell you when they are ready (usually 3 years and older). There are well known pediatricians, even a pediatric urologist, who are convinced that potty training should be left up to the child. That early potty training gives withholding problems, increasing urinary tract infections, constipation, and psychiatric complexes.

When affluence increased along with the convenience of disposable diapers, the starting age to potty train seemed to get pushed back later and later. In 1957, >90% of children were trained before 18 months of age. By 1999, that number decreased to <15% (Goode, 1999 New York Times). With more and more children having both parents working full time, I suspect that this trend will continue. Like most of our child rearing philosophies that do not have strong research based conclusions, we base our recommendations on years of experience from our pediatric practice as we are privileged to see the entire spectrum of ways to potty train. We also get to learn from training our own children! Our conclusion is that if the guidelines below are followed we do not think there is any down side to training your child as early as you want. For most families, if your child is normal (no medical related issues, or developmental delay), we think the best time to start training is between 15-18 months of age. This hand out will specifically focus on this age group.

Is my child ready?

Before starting toilet training, many "experts" think that children should be able to do many complex tasks...communicate the need to go, walk to the toilet, stay dry for several hours, take clothes off and on, etc... We disagree. The only thing your child has to display is normal social human interactions, i.e, express the desire to please and have appropriate social responses. Generally this occurs anywhere from 12-18 months of age. We think there is a critical time when parents can most effectively and efficiently potty train and so special attention needs to be paid to your child's development. It is true that a 2 year old can train faster and easier on average, BUT there is a higher failure rate (about 20%) at that age, meaning that you are more likely to be unsuccessful and run into serious problems. There are numerous examples where a determined parent attempts to start training their smart 2 ½ year old, only to find there is a new boss in town. Being that you can't force them to go to the bathroom it is probably better at that point to just wait until they are willingly do it. Otherwise, when they realize that you lost the potty war, they will start wondering what other battles they can win! Bedtime? Eating vegetables?

Am I ready to help? This is probably the most important question. Just like teaching your child other important healthy habits, potty training takes time. The parent or caretaker needs to have time and be dedicated during the training process. Although some kids can train in 2-3 days, others will take a few weeks to get the hang of it. Nothing is more confusing to a child then creating a pattern at home on Saturday and Sunday where they are using the toilet, and then using their diaper on Monday - Friday at daycare. In addition, if your child is young, 15-18 months of age, when they potty train, they will almost certainly continue to have an accident from time to time, which also takes time and patience. Remember, the positives of not having to wipe messy bottoms, buying diapers, disposing diapers, and ensuring a higher overall success rate is worth the few accidents a week that will occur for a

few months. If your situation prevents you from meeting these requirements then it is likely better for you to just wait and plan to possibly be in it for the long haul.

How long will it take to learn? If training is going well, it will take a few days to a couple of weeks to have them using the potty regularly. Once they are using it regularly you can expect that if you remember to check in with them and or take them on a schedule they will be close to 100% dry during the day. Most children learn to control their bowels before or at the same time that they learn to stay dry during the day. Staying dry at night may take months to years longer. Girls usually complete toilet training earlier than boys. First children usually take longer than subsequent children to complete toilet training.

Kapaa Pediatrics Toilet Training Method:

1. Make sure your child is not constipated. Starting at 12 months of age they should be having a bowel movement at least once a day. The texture should not be harder than a soft log that breaks up in the water. Our best advice to avoid constipation is do not give your child cow's milk. If you decide to use cow's milk at a year of age and your child gets constipated stop it ASAP. A distended colon will push on the bladder and cause all sorts of bladder dysfunction and spasm that can make training very difficult. If your child is constipated this needs to be fixed before our method will be successful.
2. Do not use potty chair. Most parents buy this but very few actually use it for any significant duration. It is just another variation that is unnecessary. A toilet seat insert is sufficient. The child like to be just like their parents and often insist on using the adult toilet.
3. Show them: For a few days before you start, take them with you every single time you go to the bathroom. The more the better. Show them what comes out and where it goes. Use the words that you plan to use, whatever they may be, e.g, "pee pee, doo doo." Say it clearly before you are going, when you are going, and after you go. Be excited when you go as if you are very proud of yourself.
4. Morning Potty: As soon as they wake up in the morning, take them to the potty. Do not wait and play for a few minutes in bed as you may miss the best opportunity. Take them and sit them on the potty, and simply say "pee pee, doo doo." Anywhere from 5-60 seconds is enough. The second they want to get off, help them off. Then take them straight to the shower or tub, since they are naked, and tell them "I need to wash our feet." Turn the water and splash water on your own feet and your child's feet. Do this for another 60 seconds, do not mention any potty words. This takes this experience off the potty training issue and will create a non stressful environment. Usually they will go pee. Get excited, but not too excited, and say "you went pee pee." This will help them get the association of the word with the physical sensation. If they do not, that is okay, dry them off and keep them naked or big kid underwear if they insist, and repeat this process every hour until you are successful either on the potty or in the bathtub.
5. Schedule: Once they go, you can space out your time to every 1-2 hours. Repeat the exact same method. Many training sites say every 15-30 minutes but in our opinion this is not necessary and not realistic. You also do not have to go crazy with juice or any other unhealthy treats to get them to drink a lot. Breast milk and water is the best and will do just fine. It is important to take them 10 minutes after eating meals, a common time when they have to go doo doo. Remember to be consistent with your potty words and consistent with washing their feet in the tub.
6. Celebration: One of the perks of early training and getting the developmental timing right is that you don't need candy, toys, or star charts. The only thing your child needs is to see your approving loving excitement that they go pee and poop just like you! So when they do actually hit their potty target for the first time it is time to celebrate. Simple words, eye contact, and excitement. Call anyone and everyone who is in the house to come and celebrate the occasion.
7. Maintenance phase: Once your child is using the potty regularly, you can start to work on communicating the need to use the bathroom. You can start to ask them by pointing to the private area "need to go pee pee or doo doo?" If they say yes then you should take them. If they don't that is okay, but don't forget at around 2 hours if they still haven't gone you should take them to the potty to try, and also to the tub if they don't go in the potty. This will help decrease the amount of accidents.
8. **No scolding, disciplining, or punishing:** Perhaps the most important concept of early training is that you should never scold, discipline, or punish, your child if they do not go or have an accident. I think that most of the negative effects that people mention about early potty training stem from parent's verbal, emotional,

or physical abuse that occur when a child has an accident. I can recall myself getting frustrated at my 20 month old for having an accident after she had not had an accident for a couple months, telling her in a stern voice “no, no, you go in the potty, you just made a big mess.” Then I remembered she was only 20 months.

9. Accidents: They will happen. Sometimes they will drink more. Sometimes they will get diarrhea. Sometimes they will get constipated and pee three times in an hour. Sometimes they will purposely try and withhold. It may be because they are busy, or maybe mad at you. Chances are many times you won't be able to figure it out. Don't get emotional, just continue with the same method. By being patient and consistent you will make it through the ups and downs and in a few months they will smooth out.

Refusing the toilet: If your child is older and has not been able to train, it can be very difficult to train them before they make the decision that they want to use the potty. Here are some possible tips to try.

- Remember, NEVER scold, discipline, or punish your child. This can be particularly hard when your child is old enough to have full conversations with you and still refuses to poop on the potty.
- Hiding to poop: Sometimes using a stool softener can trick them if they pee in the potty well but refuse to poop in the potty. Sometimes loosening the stools make it impossible to hold in while sitting on the potty and help convince them that they do not have to fear going doo-doo on the potty.
- Have one last talk about toilet training with your child. Tell your child that his poop wants to be in the toilet and it is his job to help the poop come out.
- Stop toilet training for a few weeks or months. Do not mention anything related to the act. Just change them and move on with the day. This will reassure them they have control over the process and may decide it is now okay for them to make the decision to use the potty.
- Encourage the child to imitate you or your other children by inviting the child into the bathroom to watch.
- Encourage the child to change his/her own diapers.
- Create a star or sticker chart and reward your child for both trying and successfully having a bowel movement on the toilet.

*** Patient handouts created by Kapa'a Pediatrics are intended to give parents the most common and pertinent facts about a certain issue. If there is ever any concern that your child was given an incorrect diagnosis or is not following the usual expected course for an illness please call us to speak with a physician. (808) 634-8011 ***